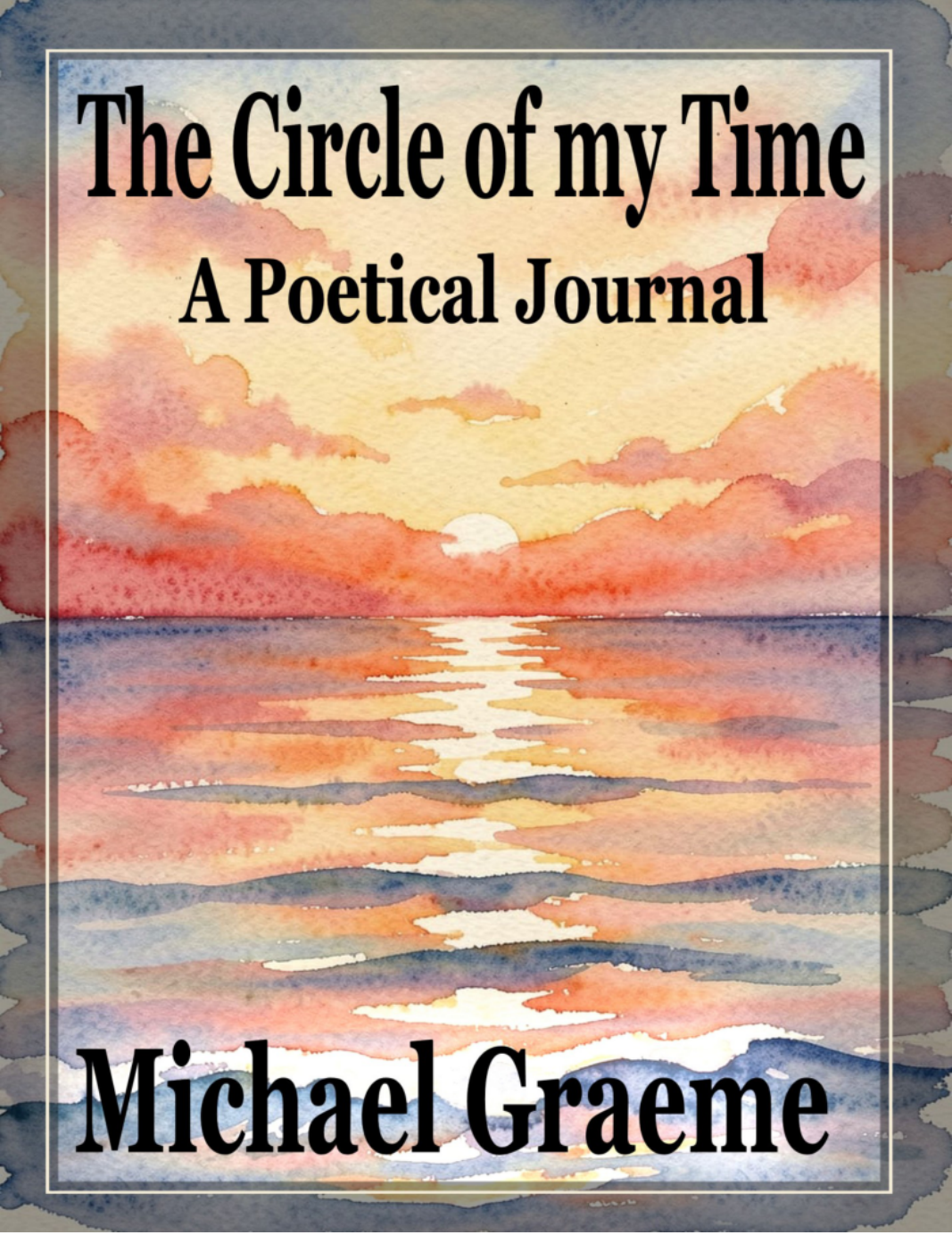
The Circle of my Time
A Poetical Journal
Michael Graeme

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Preface

These poems are milestones of a journey, from early to late middle age, and into what some call the sunset years – though the light as yet shows no sign of fading.

They are acts of observation: of weather and landscape, of the social world and its fractures, also of the psyche that underlies all things. They are, in the older sense, then, an alchemical work, meaning the attempt to follow where the inner life leads, through reflection, through dreams, and the discipline of attention to the creative life.

I have held nothing back the muse required, though much that she did not.

These poems are consigned now to the Internet Archive — not in search of recognition, but more because this is what the work asks of me and of itself: to outlast me, and to find whatever readers it finds.

Michael Graeme

May 2026

2007-2009

The path down by the river

This evening I took the path down by the river.
It was steamy after day-long summer rains,
and the hedgerows were dark with a heavy green.
The balsam and the grasses drooping seemed,
already weary,
as if anticipating dryness and decay,

It was not a pretty way,
the broken Tarmac giving out to stones,
then the mud and slime,
of a long tractor weary lane.
Tall, neglected hawthorns,
and the tracks of bikes and dogs and boots,
promised no magic.

The light was poor,
a clouded evening coming on,
while the scent of wet meadows and hedgerows,
and mud grew strong.
I did not know this place,
and strained to catch its mood –
whether its face be welcoming or sour.

The path narrowed suddenly,
overhung with neglect,
before fading into the silvery ghosts
of footprints drawn across the meadow,
and I stood perplexed,
eyeing the river's still distant curve.
There was no path,
no friendly way down to the liminal zone.
only the locals who ignored the trespass,
dared go beyond the meadow's rim,
while I, a stranger, stood and stared,
unsure and shy.

And missing you.

August 2008

Aberbach

This afternoon I walked to Aberbach,
with summer hung about me
in the deep lanes,
sluggish with a heavy green,
all slick and dripping with a warm drizzle.

My head was dulled,
unwilling to engage the world,
or even less to wrest dim meaning
from the mystery of its shadow places.
Instead I sought only silence,
somewhere to float a while,
in the luxury of this silken nothingness.

This lonely bay
where solitude availed itself,
on a wet Monday afternoon,
granted me a wordless sympathy.
and in the rhythm of the sea,
washing upon the shingle shore,
I entered a realm of complete detachment.

Great tide lined cliffs,
weather worn, meadow topped,
and pathways zig zagging,
to blue-grey streaks of sky,
formed the bowl in which I sat,
snug, while the summer rain dripped
from the brim of my hat

There were no thoughts,
no wisdoms written,
in the code of ages here,
but something of greater value:
brief sanctuary, and freedom,
from the debilitating need,
to understand.

August 2009

Between the tides

I find myself caught
between the tides,
surrounded by a shallow sea,
with you,
your heartbeat unfamiliar,
but not unkind.
And me, as always, slow to dance,
to rhythms I cannot comfortably circle
with my hips.

But we are not trapped here.
this loneliness is finite,
familiar in its melancholy,
transient as birds.

And though the distant shore,
of all we know seems lost,
it is not blackness,
nor treachery that waylays,
more a friendly fate,
I think.
One that in kindness cannot give us up
as flotsam tossed to rot again,
in mud.

Take then my hand my love,
until you feel the dance in me,
and I in you.
And let us make the rhythm
of our selves
once more our own.

February 2013

Carrying the Prelude

I carried the Prelude,
as The Lady slit the waters of the lake.
Black they were, like tar,
unrippled in stillness.
And the hills sweated in white wreaths,
hung, and slipping down,
to touch shy fingers to a silver shore.

How much of this memory is mine?
How much is his?
Here, he tells me,
look at this, from long ago,
and know,
thy God as love.

But it was not love.
Not then.
Loneliness was more my muse,
cold hands wrapped around my heart,
so with each breath
I was reminded of my separateness.

Beloved of none.
No Dorothy,
no Mary,
no Sara to warm the empty way,
where light of love has never shone,

And where I was bound that day.

June 2013

Old Town

When I think of the town, I think of what has gone.
I think of factories boarded and barred –
once great houses of power
chopped into an untidy miscellany
of sporadic, shambolic enterprise.

I remember years bent over drawing boards,
tracing lines with ink,
shaping metals into structures,
possessed of a strange beauty –
it was art by any other name.

And I think of the men and women who worked,
in the ugliness, in the dirt and roar,
who, by their presence, gave it warmth
and meaning,
and on whose going
are we bequeathed now,
this unredeemable emptiness.

There is no romance in an empty mill,
nor in a poor man's pocket.
No nobility in the fall from work.
for a working wage.

There is only the emptiness of an old town,
with nothing but memories of its past,
and the streets painted

with an already peeling veneer,
of cheapness and the transience of these,
our modern times.

July 2013

Black Dog

Raindrops bead the glass,
as I sit drifting,
into catatonic trance,
aching for the long ago,
and a comfort,
once but dimly grasped.

Sky –
dirty white,
and streaked with grey.
I watch green hills fade,
as the day kneels in mourning,
for a spirit lost.

I let it go.
It tumbles,
turning slow, then breaks,
upon this tired old earth,
and turns,
once more to dust.

Reeds shake upon a ground unknown,
while chill winds raise a tremble,
among listless thoughts.
Brain jammed,
tweak the dial for something new,
static rasps and squeals,
then fades again
to this vacuum
that was once my heart,
now suspended,
perilous,
like a stone in mud –
each breath to sink it lower
Into dark obscurity.

Black dog,
stalking through the tall grass,
at once familiar,
and alone, beyond all things,
faithful to the last.

October 2013

An Autumn Day in the Lakes

Black crags crackling,
heads blurred in mellow mistiness,
above the stillness,
of a silver threaded vale.
Mirror tarn, splashed,
russet and green,
somnambulantly lapping,
on shingle shores.
Old barn,
stone laid over stone,
mossy and slick-glistening,
after soft rains fall.
And me.
My eye records,
commits to memory,
what the heart imbues,
with lovers' meaning;
inspiration like rooks, black flapping
through the atom spaces,
snatched tail feathers,
hard won glimmerings
of things unseen;
a fey spirit moving,
migrating once more
to the summer places.

November 2013

Fractured Beauty

I recall an immense stillness,
a velvet, sparkling night,
and a full, perigee moon,
painting white wavelets,
on the black lake,
lapping far below.

Left and right,
pine forests pricked the sky,
dark on darker still,
enfolding us in hushed embrace.

Small hours late we stood,
beneath that moon,
stealing minutes,
from the dawn.
Your perfume, razor sharp,
seemed a blade to part,
the thickness of the summer air.

Mute, I let the night imprint itself.

I did not know you then,
nor ever would;
a fool in love with love,
and you,
in thrall to blood,
and breath,
and bone,
yet too young to guide,
too young to say: forget love.
and just make love.
And me too shy to steal,
what you but loosely did conceal.

You judged me empty, perhaps.
Yet I was full,
only cautious and ill prepared,
for you.
And that big moon,
bright witness, shone
upon the fractured beauty,
of it all.

November 2013

Set gently down to rest

Wet Sunday,
hours leaking,
to the sterile void.

Reading, writing,
doggedly seeking direction,
from calamity,
for freedom's sake.

Puzzle of Pilgrims old,
long coded;
how diligently I fail,
with these false starts.

How rare the vital flow,
where water falls,
and feels the surer shape,
of all that's true.

How neat then turns,
that beguiling beauty,
twisting in my fingers,
its vital heart!
beating true.

Or is it only time, ticking?
Black wings of flight?
If I could arrest its motion,
now!
This code,
I'd grasp it true.

Meanwhile the hours rotate,
imprison,
clang-shut in time
this fool,
still frantic with the puzzle,
making haste
and Blind,

He forgets,
how the mind opens best,
with eyes closed,
and the pen,

set gently down,
to rest.

January 2014

The Ebb Tide

The tide ebbs,
and leaves nothing.
I scan the beach
for bits of interesting flotsam;
things that might sparkle in the sun,
and which, from a distance
look promising.

I imagine rare jewels,
or a twist of something golden in the sand,
and scamper after each,
to discover, amid the tangle
of fly swarmed detritus,
only junk;
uninspiring;
worthless as the world.

It goes out a long way here;
miles and miles of slime-mud,
a disturbing plane of nothingness.

How naked and alone,
at ebb tide,
I am revealed,
void even of the illusion
of my robes of idle fancy.

Is it true then?
that beneath the jolly roll
of light-danced waves,
there is hidden nothing
but the sly clams sucked deep,
and the rotting carcases of those
who swam too near
a barren shore?

April 2014

2017-2019

Drops of Silver Dew

December morning,
sluggish dawn,
of greys and greens,
and mist and mud,
where water weeps
into long hollows,
and pools like eyes,
which lidless gaze
at still sleepy skies.
And the ways,
heavy under foot,
slow my passing,
and would arrest me,
arms outstretched,
gnarled fingers grasping air,
lifeless as the hawthorn,
bare and dripping drops,
of silver dew.

December 2017

Until the Music Calls us Home

The waking world is strange again today.
I rise a man unseen, and old and grey,
the shrill alarm resisted to the last.

My eyes in waning darkness glimpse untold
the colour of lost dreams and turns to dust,
the ghosts of things I can no longer hold.

Strange too the look of faces as they pass.
They see perhaps the mark of one who's danced
upon that midnight green, beneath the trees,
with Fancy for his bride whose touch
holds all who've known her, and with queenly ease,
captures the heart that quails, and feels too much.

Mornings like this I see a world spread thin,
its promises grown weak, its sunlight dimmed
to cast its spectral shadows on the walls,
the things and thoughts I once pursued in vain.
But now I feel there's nothing there at all,
And sooner would I sleep than rise again.

I am a step removed and move unknown,
lost now to all who knew me as their own.
Thoughts turn to things unseen, yet seeming real.

Faint music heard at dusk calls my return,
to dance again and then once more to feel,
the beat of Fancy's heart, from whom I learn
the soul of one who hesitates to cross
the threshold of this world laments its loss.

It lingers at the edge of what is known,
guilt wracked by its own strangeness, crouching low,
outcast from its own dreaming, and alone,
marks time, until the music calls us home.

November 2017

On a Dust Dry Afternoon

On a dust dry afternoon,
in a quake of stupefying heat,
I tip the pencil to the page
of thoughts as yet unspun,
and pause.

So long a ghost now, flitting soft,
unseen, unheard while held aloft
on gossamer threads,
wind-trailed for fey arachnid flight,
afraid to freeze myself,
descend into uncompromising shape,
and speak...

July 2018

Treasured Teatime Tryst

Dark Midnight of the soul awakes to weary dawn,
pale lightbulb of a miserable morn illuminates the new,
while six-thirty fingers to the nadir point, and state:
get up, you fool, you're going to be late!

The house glows feeble in a tired beige,
stunned by this outrageous wrench from rest,
smells of mould, old breath, and bread.
Levered gently upright now we test,
our limbs, joints, feet, for steadiness,
Then pee out our first long whimpering complaint,
and fart.

Breakfast ritual, drinking down the news,
between heaped spoons of porridge,
sweetened against habitual morning blues.
Yes, yes the news.

Finger flicking through brevatious blatherings,
picking at sores until they bloom raw,
yet festering of an incoherence vast,
so each day borrows vagueness of delineation,
from the last.

Same old, same old then,
we begin.

Thin half-light, and a grey car
glitters in a cold cocoon of dew,
air stung by smoke of autumn burning wood.
Wipe the shivering glass to a lesser opaqueness,
blow away the mist, with roaring fan,
then drive.

The house shuts back its eyes at the parting gate,
Reverts to sleep, and a mellow moldiness.
It remembers not, nor waits.

Thus I, into black face of morning stare,
continuing a slow meander,
into the dreaming, wakeful blur,

a place that is not truly awake,
more these days a soft cushion
occasionally spiked
with the shards of old longing,
rendered docile now across the years.

Dawn deepens to the soporific rumble of the road,
leading more into delusions of the day's crass light,
from which we turn our thoughts,
and pray haste our treasured teatime tryst to keep,
that therein we might once more escape,
this melancholic life of sleep.

November 2017

The Void of Timeless Time

There is no time,
when, from time to time,
we chance across each other's path.
No chance either,
not really,
in this,
the scheme of how things lie.

There is only an eternal sense,
of blessing,
of stillness,
and a sacred elegance.

Today we stand apart,
as always,
mute.
But across this void of timeless time,
and empty air,
In my heart,
And in my deepest soul,

We dance.

June 2018

Pebble From an Aching Sunset Shore

The hills do not remember,
nor these scattered hoary stones,
nor the foxgloves,
nodding in long sleepy lanes,
nor the oaks whose leaves,
turning now their silvered backs,
anticipate the coming rains.

There is no memory, nor time,
in this hung moment,
as a white, full faced moon
rises, and a fierce heat-wave sun,
forsakes at last the day,
and tempers back its blade,
in a cooling quench
of amber bay.

And here I sit, alone,
shouldering the burden of this beauty,
drinking down in greedy gallons now,
my last fill of tranquil air,
that I might remember, and take with me,
this pebble from an aching sunset shore,
caressed to a fleeting liquid prettiness,
in a golden wash of sea.

July 2018

In the Barber's Chair

As I sit in the barber's chair,
this sunny autumn afternoon,
my hair fast tumbling to my lap
in short shorn clumps of steely fuzz,
the barber's nimble clippers buzz,
tracing out the shape of bone,
vibrating deep into the well,
of thoughts and other things unknown.

And in the mirror opposite,
with spectacles removed I see
a blur that looks a bit like me,
turned back now to a smoother flesh,
and freshly spun naivete.

A young man in the barber's chair,
a sunny autumn afternoon,
his hair fast tumbling to his lap,
a blonde and honeyed fuzz, lit gold
in sunlight slanting bright and low.
And with much clearer eyes than mine,
he spies himself grown grey and old,
upon the treading mill of time.

I wonder what he sees in me?
if after all these years at last,
are we become, in later life
what we both thought by now we'd be?

Or does my portrait disappoint?
this face, this hair of thinning grey,
our path subverted and waylaid,
it seems with every single step.
And even now, come autumns' turn,
How precious little have we learned?

And me, regarding him?
Do I consider my self now,
no wiser than I was back then?
Am I no more than old and thin?

The trim is done, and parting slow,
I quietly beseech my past,
keep faith we'll one day surely see,
relaxing in this barber's chair,
the man we both still want to be.

October 2018

The Fractured Shore

In this last settled hour before the dawn,
I dig my heels to slow the flow of time,
and with each measured breath,
embrace departing ghosts of dreams,
until at length, and with sad smiles,
they waste into the thinning night.

And the sun rises,
ignites first light of trembling day,
and burns to clear blue,
somnambulant mists of sleep,
from whence souls crash their dancing flight,
become flesh,
fallen again in this deep befuddled mess,
of pillow, sheet, and creaking bed.

Then here am I once more,
slow ache of a man, rising,
washed back upon this fractured shore.

October 2018

Blind Cats Eyes

November and these cloud-thick nights,
darken now my wending of the way,
releasing sleepy thoughts,
from the oppression,
of that harsher light of waking day.

Such a long road, so often travelled,
but now without the stars to guide,
their names forgotten,
friendly patterns lost
as with the memory
of once clearer skies.

There are just these vague pecked lines,
ticking out the time,
and the blind old eyes of cats,
sunk, each in their little pit of grime,
depressed in layer upon layer
of careless tar,
and just the odd one
feebly blinking now
at the passing of my car.

Lost souls, all.
Adrift, alone.
And not a candle in the dark,
to guide us home.

November 2018

This Jagged Mess of Days

Resisting now this jagged mess of days,
brings on the dark assassin's migraine knives,
when even to tread the softer, slower ways,
exhausts me long before the weekend has arrived.

Thwarted then, both inside myself and out,
suspended, void of time and space and thought,
I ride an inky blackness of self doubt,
until to cloying stillness am I brought.

The windows of my soul are growing old,
long papered o'er by fools upon the make.
Their ragged posters many lies have told,
the perpetrators slippery as snakes.

Here then, shall I submit? Is it too late?
No wisdom in the wind, no maps extol
the seamless passage through that gateless gate,
just a bloodied mess of thorns I'm fain to hold.

The season of the inner light grows dim,
and with it hope I'll ever once more know,
that place of perfect harmony within,
the place I have for so long ached to go.
November 2018

A Walk up Great Hill

I take the path by Dean Brook,
follow in my father's footsteps.
Fifty summers gone, he led the way,
but there's no trace of him now,
beyond imagination.

The moors, quiet in a steamy heat,
exhale soft scent of ferns and earth.
Narrow here, the path,
above a deepening,
water rushed ravine.
Here too, a leg twisting tangle of heather,
and all the tricky snares
of grass.

Hesitant of foot,
I fear more to fall
than I did back then,
cock-sure footed
and safe in the cradle,
of my father's immortality.

Now I fear the void of empty air,
and the cold embrace of peaty scum,
then to be denied deliverance,
from the drowning pools,
for lack of saviour.

Today, the journey speaks
of emptiness
among sheep-ruined hills.
And rising now to pulled-down farms,
hungry ghosts whisper tales
of grinding lives, eked out
and gone,
names unknown,
scattered by the wind as leaves,
now dried and scratching brittle,
In this soured dust.

And on top of Great Hill,

there is litter.

January 2019

Risking it

Wintering in the same old cold and grey,
waiting for that chance-thing to arise
and say: here, this is how,
revealed in unambiguous guise,
you might now see and act
and leave behind at last
the lies you tell yourself
in order to maintain
this never ending waiting game!

But there is nothing new today.
No novelties arise, just the same
old cold and grey in which
you wear the usual disguise,
revealing this uncomfortable truth,
that for all your life you've hid,
dissolved in indecision.
And of all the things, of your own volition,
you might heartily have risked, and done,
you never risked, or did,
a single one.

March 2019

Childhood

He lost the Faery tongue aged five,
lost it to chalk boards
and vague threats of God.
It was the Gulag then for him,
his life now frozen for want of sun
and green. And where, when
he was not afraid,
boredom was the name
of his routine.

Bare-toothed and baying,
grey wolves circled and chastised
all vestige of the Faery from his eyes,
their faces hard, but for those times,
and times again, of false grace,
when he observed they bowed
at every mention of His name.
This God, beneficent of the angry
and the cruel, but no friend to the reticent
or the cowed.

So, he sought solace
in the prettiness of girls a-while,
and pined.
And thinking what he felt divine,
put all his hopes in Love,
and thereby came to see,
amongst all flesh, at least,
the fact of his invisibility,
this Faery child,
alone among the chained
and shuddering freaks,
trapped in the darkness
of an all too swiftly run mortality.

Thus one by one they fell.
The reticent, the cowed,
the lovers, and the wolves, and all.
All into that dark abyss were swept.
While he, invisible to the last,

unknown and untouched still,
watched each one fall in turn,
and wept.

April 2019

Last Spark

A languid sun sinks low and seeps
into the wide horizon's reach,
bleeds then into a watery stain,
now smoothing out the wounded sky,
and soothing all our heads for sleep.

Through blunt anaesthetising rays
I squint, forgetting now the day
and its long labours drawn,
daring instead to harbour hopes
that from this heavy-limbed fatigue
tonight, I'll find my rest in dreams.

Meanwhile, I sit entranced and still,
allow the sun to finger through
the clutter of my memories,
brush back the sleeves of ancient tunes,
whose sweetness I had long-thought gone,
though each now shudders back to life,
beneath the needle's crackling pass.

Then, slow, into a coppered sea,
the sun departs the fractious day,
and with one final spark, is gone.
The day is done, and as I start my little car,
and turn at last my wheels for home
I know, for all the life on earth,
we feel each setting sun alone.

May 2019

The Circle of My Time

In this, the circle of my time,
I see the world for what it is,
these petty things arrayed,
and how the mind perceives,
through its filter of a fractured brain.
And all it is, is dust upon our fingertips,
trailed loose upon a plain
of imperfect understanding.
So blow the dust away,
then, clean fingered come
closer to my lips, that I might
whisper it to you;
what the circle of my time
in time reveals.

August 2019

The Messy Wash of Summer

August Bank Holidays
and the messy wash
of summer ebbs
into this evening's silty sea,
while the little bulbs strung
along the promenade
fake starlight.
And a sleepy sun sets
as figures, faded,
colourless as ghosts now
walk serene the echoing boards,
towards the west.

We hold our breath,
speak softly,
as tiptoe of night hides the worst,
smears all into one soft sleepy blur,
we, the lovers, and the lonesome
and the weary, and the cursed.

August 2019

Pleasant company

My head is empty now.
It's all pale-blue light up there,
and cool, but void,
while my heart, now bare,
smoulders red,
with stern avoidances deployed:
doors locked firm inside, in dread,
preserving freedom
from all I sooner would deny.

I am serene but dull, you see?
Superficial curtains thrust aside,
announce bare-faced my presence still
to all you lazy passers by,
but too late now to reach,
and call those deep-down parts of me,
The hazy recollections of laughter,
amid cosiness, and the rest-easy peace,
of pleasant company.

September 2019

Cold Calling

I lost my friend. He did not die,
he just forgot my name.
And now I'm sorry,
I let slide too many days.

And then I telephoned, you see?
brim full of news and guilt,
and thinking to snatch back
full tilt, those sacks of missing time,
only then to find old age's stealth
and the mind's fragility,
had robbed him
of both himself, and me.

And falling thus into the void
was all we'd said and done,
and all we'd seen,
and all the places that we'd been.
and the laughter,... oh the jolliness,
it was all gone,
and I was just this stranger,
cold-calling, on the telephone.

December 2019

2020-2023

A Good Clock

It was a good clock, sitting there,
on the mantle of my childhood,
black-cased and glossy
as a piano's ebony key.

It was the size of my hand,
and a good weight,
with gold fingers, like daggers drawn
on a white dial, peppered with soot.

There, it ticked down the years,
gained ever so slowly,
drawn back now and then
to the pips of the BBC.

But in memory it never falters,
just marks time, those fingers
imperceptibly moving, scything
a rich harvest of days.

I don't know where it went.
I heard it had stopped, was thrown away.
Pity. I would have liked to see,
if I could get going again.

January 2020

The Landlord Smiles

They look a bunch of toughs, these guys,
red-cheeked and strutting,
chests out like cockerels.
Already drunk, by noon,
they laugh in pork-pie hats.

Their eyes are bloodshot, noses swollen,
pockmarked with the corrosive booze
of long years.
Their jokes are coarse,
take shots at women
and immigrants.

Self importantly they cruise
the public houses,
puffed up,
in search of inanity,
exchanging pithy barbs,
and seeking revelation,
in the bottom of yet another glass.
Meanwhile their bodies turn their beer
to gas and pee.

The landlord smiles his sly welcome,
bids them enter,
cheers them on.

January 2020

The Golden Fish

I dreamed a golden fish,
serene, amid a wasted lake.
It rose through silted depths,
to greet a narrow slant of sun.

A sterile place, no air to breathe,
only a fathomless unknown,
this infertile shore I'd sooner leave,
than ponder one more time alone.

But then this vision of the golden fish,
in tender glint of amber sun.
It bids me stay.

One thought, it says, one single shy idea,
amid the tumult of this tumbling year,
is worth the hanging on.

If only I could tell,
among the log-jam of these thoughts,

which one.

December 2020

The Oak and the Stone

Beneath the hill there stood an oak tree,
and beneath the tree there was a stone.
And the stone, it was an anchor,
to hold the heavens down.

But then came the generations,
for whom the stars grew dim.
Then came the man who built a house
and sealed himself within.

And the house stood in a garden,
but the garden was too small.
So he burned the tree and broke the stone,
to extend his garden wall.

Then his pastures grew infertile,
As the Sun King lost his mind,
And the moon, she raised the wind and rain
And turned his lands to slime.

The heavens still shone brightly,
above the man's bowed head,
but the stone was gone, the tree was burned,
and the heavens, they could not return,
until both man and house were gone.
And from that rested ground
there grew, from acorns,
trees and trees anew.

Then the Sun King smiled,
and the Moon, his Queen,
she blessed the men who tended trees,
and raised back the stones from memories
of when in former times we'd felt
the heavens stirring in our bones.

They kept to modest house and home,
knowing all would be well
'twixt heaven and earth
but only if they left
the mighty oak alone.

January 2021

A Boat into the West

I'll take the ticking of my father's watch
and the tales my mother told,
and I shall pack them safe with fragrances,
in the pocket of my soul.

There shall be sandalwood and cinnamon,
for days beneath the sun,
while for the moon I'll ride on lavender,
until the dreaming has begun.

And there I shall encamp myself
in a meadow by the sea,
and from the shore I shall take pebbles,
as round as round can be.

And I shall plant them in that dreaming earth,
a dreaming circle wide,
and wait upon the morning,
and the coming of my guide.

I shall know him by his wisdom,
and the feeling I am blessed.
Then we shall wait upon the sunset
and a boat, into the west.

April 2021

Seldom Walked Ways

July swells to a deeper green.
Riot of wildflower,
pointillistic specks
of yellow and blue,
in meadows left unmown.
Lazy smudge of ancient trod
under the steam heat of a
sunless afternoon,
while balsam and nettle,
and long, drooping grasses,
cross their sleepy arms
over seldom walked ways.

July 2021

How Beautiful We Still Are

Hot day at the beach.
Blue sky and a hard sun,
softens now to haze of golden evening.
Skimpy girls twirl
in summer shimmerings,
and kiss-me colours,
while tanned boys
with sharp beards
point their chins in strutting play.
A medley of tongues,
and skins drift,
arm in arm, dreaming,
towards the pier's westward end.
How beautiful we still are,
when our hearts transcend
the fear.

July 2021

The Clearer Light of Day

Unplugging all connections,
unfastening all the snares,
might we not embrace this cleaner air,
And fall?

See how tight we cling
to things
of no consequence,
our fingers jammed in every crack,
our arms, oh so tired now,
and aching,
legs, fearful, shaking.

Let it go, let it all go,
and backwards fall, and trust.
No dash of rocks, no rush
of earth to black.
There is only this endless void, and true,
in which we might begin,
to embrace the world anew,
then open up our Eye,
and let the clearer light, of day,
come flooding in.

September 2021

Nothing Worth the Dive

The payers, grown lean of late,
fall to the myriad blades,
of this, their unfortunate fate.
They perish in great number,
rule takers, not breakers,
while the players, and rule makers,
wrapped in capital colours,
prance, booze faced, and hearty,
make large and party.

Meanwhile, in the hollow land,
a bare tree claws the last warm rags
from a sinking sun.
A kestrel shoulders air,
but – nothing worth the dive –
moves on.

January 2022

This Slower Time of Turning

As I've grown old and hard,
she has softened sweet,
regressed to slight of youth,
and dances now,
thin-veiled, in the forest of this,
the moon's first crescent whim.
And she teases with her fluid hips.

I did know her, once,
when we both were of an age.
But she has grown so young,
of late, and wise,
and I can no longer enter in
that forest's ferny shade.
For I am grown too slow,
to bide, and dance such fevered reels.
I must, alone then, brave
this slower time of turning,
and the wilderness within.

January 2022

Doing Nothing to Offend

Do I see only a reflection here
of my own place in time?
Is it impenetrable,
and mirror to my whims?
Or is it a portal, a way through
to something new,
beyond these bland, trinket-hung walls
of an already blurred understanding?

Can I render myself small enough,
do you think?
Atom small, let's say,
and squeeze through?
Or might I only observe from here,
anchored in this half seen corner
of the world?

How can I discern the truth?
Test the evidence of my eyes?
Can I reach out,
attempt a crossing to that other place
at risk of smeary fingerprints,
marks of bruised rebuff upon the glass,
witness then I could not pass,
and skittered back to grey?

Better to pretend I see nothing.
feel nothing,
and thus guarantee,
I do nothing to offend.

July 2022

One Last Lawn

My first, when I was young, I sowed from seed,
raked the bare earth, picked out the stones,
the weeds, levelled the undulations.
It was seasons in the making,
but never took the mower well.

And she disliked the way it grew,
the shape of things, and the borders,
as they took on angles, and a sharpness.
She moved her mother in,
and moved me on.
And that first lawn?
It went to hell.

The second lawn was older, long-established.
But I found it weary with weed, and ire.
It was bare in places, too,
scars of abuse, and neglect.
So many seasons, that one,
in the nurturing,
but then such lush maturity,
and a pleasure in the mow.

It was rich, and sweet,
a summer wine, sipped slow.
And her love, it was rose scented,
grown children, from another man,
the only thorns.
When she passed, my love died with her,
As did the lawn.
And the children, vexatious,
they moved me on as well.

Now the seasons they grow numbered,

As I cross the void once more,
Seeking love in loneliness,
And one last lawn to mow.

September 2022

Quiet Cat

In this, the wide tumbling wake
of suffering's ship,
there bobs the newsman,
with the machine gun smile,
and the net pot-stirrer,
whose manic guile
thrills to trigger and engage.
They have us beat our chests at dutiful pace,
while the wedge of woes they drive divides,
and turns both parted sides
to hate, and rage.

There is no respite
even in the velvet deeps of sleep
where, amid the churn of day-spun things,
we might yet coax the quiet cat come lay,
across our laps and, deep-vibrating,
purr our fears away.

Night-forest black, cautious, fey,
it gazes, curious, upon the fires,
and at the ghoulish dances of our kind,
then turns its head, and stalks away.
None sees it come or go, but it's our fate
that all shall feel the void it leaves behind.

October 2022

Echoes of Awareness

A passing silence, echoes of awareness,
resisting now the urge to grasp,
whatever random lines
might be wrought and tapped out
into this story of a self.

Fading now, casting off sensation,
feeling, thought,
we reach the quiet shore
that is this observation of being.

Letting come, and go
without judgement,
these ripples
in golden cornfields
of experience
are where we reap our joy,
and it's from here
we bring the harvest home.

December 2022

Letters from a younger self

I know you think you've failed us, mate.
Such big dreams we've always had,
and that wide world out there to roam.
Then love!
Man, would we explode in love,
and in love, for sure, the gods
would see us home.

I know, it's not been like that.
All those circles that we drew?
They seemed so small,
and this old town, now, crumbling,
its walls, they blocked our every turn.

But what better way to shift the gaze?
From the outwards, to the in,
and through the light of imagination
to hear the angels sing.

So, do not lament the loss of ages,
for all the ages melt away,
and the atom splits to emptiness,
to that field where angels play.

Indeed, you've brought us far, old man,
you have shown the universe quite small.
You have peered us deep into infinity,
and closed our fist around it all.

February 2023

The Parlours of our Yesterdays

What use now, these sorry orphans
from the parlours of our yesterdays?
The elbows of generations once rested
between courses here,
served by stern grandmas
for whom waste and sloth were sin.

How many stories of starched Sundays,
are reflected in this sheen
of rosewood and mahogany?
What lingering scent of roast beef,
and Lord Sheraton?
What echo of the tinkle of China cups
on delicate saucers, rimmed with gold?

Oh, there is a lost symphony here.
It's all jumbled up now,
but was timed once
to the purposeful beat
of a Smiths Empire clock,
that proud Cyclops on the mantle,
flanked by brass candlesticks,
buffed to pillars of burnished gold.

When sounded then, the last post
of such ephemera as this?
When doused we the fires
of flickering amber cheer,
their bounty roaring,
half-way up the chimney?

We have not the time any more,
for grandpa's rambling tales,
nor the space to spread our elbows,

nor the coals to burn.
The grate is empty, but for these
few spent cinders of memory,
while the parlours of our yesterdays,
are empty, and cold.

March 2023

Promises of fruit

A conjuring of light and shade,
this illusion of the artist,
writ by patient brush,
and proliferated strokes
of pigmented oil.

The eye sees and applauds,
and fair enough.
But the transcendent mind
is not beguiled by these
mere promises of fruit.

It seeks instead the shadow spaces
where there hides, in misty shades,
the unseen faces of the times,
fey phantoms of the artist's mind.

They are waiting, perhaps,
for our backs to turn.
Then they shall gurn out their insult
at the shallowness
of these, our waking lives.

But if we wait long enough,
and wish it so,
we might catch them
as they morph from black
to seamless shades of grey,
and we shall not be fooled
by promises of fruit, again.

March 2023

Incurious fingertips

Sea sponges waving amid
sprinkles of sunbeam,
dispersed to twilight depths
while girls in diaphanous dresses
billow as jellyfish,
or, fractal-scaled,
to protozoa, whose bioluminescence
strobes against mother-of-pearl.

This universe,
unsuspected
in a seed of soft longing,
we crush
with incurious fingertips,
against the glass
of our two-dimensional
machinery.

April 2023

Their glorious sun

They have rendered comfortable the long miles
of dust and rock, hill and mountain way,
and secret, allium scented woodland.
They have kept dry through mud, and flood,
and left their prints in places
some people never see.

They have crunched snow, and sunk
sleepily into the softness of white-sand bays.
They have held their nerve
on the polished limestone
of the Yorkshire Dales,
soles and toes abraded to wafers now
by Lancashire's millstone grit.

They have held firm on the windy hillsides,
while my breath caught up with heart's desire.
Heather, sedge and dung,
cotton grass, and buttercup,
acid heath and meadows swelling
with a sweetening of hay.
Such days I shall not forget,
but these boots are done now
their glorious sun has set.

July 2023

A more profitable consumption

We weigh clean air and find it wanting,
lacking in substance, yet mother of creation.
Green of earth, and blue of heaven's gate,
have here their genesis in its invisible
and unprofitable nothingness.

How shall we add value then?
Shall we add poisons to the mix?
Bulk it out with heavier things?
How about the wind-blown grits
of all our failings?
For sure, then we might sell it by the kilo,
richly adulterated,
for a more profitable consumption
by the masses.

November 2023

Autumn

Autumn comes when, by tea-time's first whisperings,
light fades to a mellow gloom, and all the forest ways
wend muddy and soft-shadowed, through muted veils of gold,
and spilling red cascades, as these first spent season's leaves,
they fall into embrace of root, and tumbled wall.
Or, sweeping by, in gallant flash of bursting stream,
they dream, each of their journeys to another life.

Days then are these when misted hollows host
late season jamboree of all the fey,
down where the mushrooms grow,
from 'neath fallen bough, and bark of ancient tree,
as slowly is revealed, through phantom lace,
this gritty dome, and smudge of charcoal sky,
which gathers pace and depth, 'til roar of storm,
and lash of rain sends all the fey,
home swift to ground, to dance another day.
And then, at last, with autumn's wine downed
to the dregs, until next fecund swell of spring,
the silent forest, stripped now bare,
and starkly silhouetted, gently rests.

November 2023

The Sentinel

It stands between worlds,
light dappled, in the forest's shade,
an ancient stone
known to neither map nor man.

It guards a parting of the ways.
To the left, there are the depths,
the risk of precipice,
and the long fall of rushing water.

To the right there are the clear heights,
and the safety
of a summer's afternoon.

To the right, we gain the sun,
and the perfume of the hills.
To the left, it is the moss and mushrooms
of the forest's least known ways.
To the right, it is lightness and laughter.
To the left, we have the shrouded mystery,
and the creeping sense
of an unbounded otherness.

We place our hand upon the stone,
seek its counsel, and permission.
It senses we lack courage,
points us to the hills, guards close
the other way.

What wonders might be revealed though,
among those labyrinthine depths?
What days, what fill of life,
if only once, we might persuade
the sentinel, we were truly brave.

November 2023

A Sketch of December

The year resists the going of the light.
December now, a misty watercolour
of greys and whites, raises a rattle
from the pane. Storms, one after another
cow the days, and make each morn
a battle of the will, to rise
into this nether land, twixt sun's thin rise
and all too quick demise.

Trees braced, gaunt, arms raised,
meadows half under puddled sky
with flood, and the country ways
a heavy footed drag of
mouldering leaf and mud,
while all I want,
and in the spirit of the season,
is warm indoors to keep,
to hibernate,
sleep out the storms
and this futile light,
while counting down the moons
until first hint of spring,
in glimpse of bright lit
and crocus coloured noon

December 2023

2024

The Divine Paradox

You saved my life, I think,
it's fair to say,
breathed something back
into the hollow shell
of crushed beginnings.

Thus it was, a wilderness of grief
was rendered navigable.
And though it proved an empty love
it was a road of sorts, to walk,
a cindered path, travelled barefoot,
and alone.
But it rendered me at least functional,
no longer shrinking from the sun.

It's half a century now, good as,
but I still think of you.
It was for you I realise, belatedly,
I gained my feet,
painted back the smile,
found meaning in solitude.

When I saw you for the last time,
you looked through me.
I was not there, nor am I still,
yet still not quite able
to let you go, though go you must.

Go then, and with my gratitude
for a memory, never sullied, ever young,
and as such, the divine paradox
of loving, yet never really
knowing you.

January 2024

White Crow

White Crow old friend, pray tell me
what is the puzzle piece I lack?
For anyone with common sense,
knows all you crows are black.
Yet there you are, pristine in white,
a twinkle in your eye.
The wind invoked you long ago and, yes,..
I do remember why.

Black crows were flocking everywhere,
the colour of my days,
but each I tried to close with
would shrug and fly away.
Then circling back, they'd scornful swoop,
and peck upon my head.
There is no point in anything,
those dullard beasts all said.

So I asked the wind that bore them,
was there not another way?
And a white crow was its answer,
though why, it would not say.
How often I've rejected
the truth of what I've seen,
swore white in fact was really black,
that you were but a dream.

So what am I to make of things
when you keep on coming back?
And what fool shall believe me,
when we know all crows are black?
Are we to keep it secret, then?
Is that to be the deal?
In exchange for my discretion,
you'll show me what is real?

Then gladly, if the world shall press,
I'll firmly answer back:
that anyone with common sense
knows all the crows are black.
Then, though those crows shall scornful swoop,

they shall not peck my head.
I'll hold you safe within my heart,
and think of you instead.

January 2024

A song composed of snowdrops

This, the February of our days, sings a song
composed of snowdrops, and black earth.
True, between the lines, there are promises
of spring, of the return of light,
and the caress of balmy nights,
though lately, memory does not serve.

Instead, it cautions with a counterpoint,
reminding us of when the gentler ways were lost
to creeping bog, and of noble trees,
old friends, felled to vengeful storm.
And that when the spring
of all our aspirations comes,
As come it must, then shall our flourishing
be tempered by drought.

February 2024

The museum of the mind

The past empties, as memory
becomes a sole surviving relic,
priceless in its depiction
of the way things were.

It becomes a museum exhibit,
framed footprints in soft sand,
lost to the tides' rise and fall.

It becomes a sculpture of trees felled,
undermined by the swift river’s flood,
and it becomes a melancholy melody
of meadows lost, skyline and all,
to the serried saw-tooth rise
of suburbia’s inexorable sprawl.

No, this is not a place to linger,
this shrine, this mausoleum
of the inward folding mind.
So let us not take another turn
around its bleakly hallowed halls.
Let us not listen
to those old lyrics of lament
but seek that other place
where we might unfold,
and nurture there at least
a fragment, less austere,
less wearisome.

And there, in warmth and light,
might we not expand
into the fullness of a future, bright,
embracing all those marvels
yet to come?

February 2024

The dreaming

As we slip into our dreams tonight,
we shall forget our selves,
and wake into another life
complete with memories
of having been that way before.

There will be streets, faces, things,
indeed a world entire and known,
though not to our other self
who sleeps on, oblivious and alone.
And only when we wake,
will we know of our mistake.
That it was a dream,
and one we have not dreamed before.

Is that the way with dreams?
They make the rules, the worlds, complete
with false trails of memory,
and take all sleeping souls for fools.
Or are we more than one,
and when one sleeps,
our other's waking life,... begins?

February 2024

April Heavy

April and the meadows are heavy, still,
They keep slipping sideways, underfoot,
into little liquefactions
as we pass.
And there is pooled water,
among the deep trod mud,
where the beasts
squeeze through gates,
or gather
to await their gods.

The chestnuts' feathery leaves
have unfurled,
And the cherries frothy blow,
strikes sparks, against this iron sky
while oh so slowly warm the days,
and the timid light
inches out beyond the reach
of winter's gloomy afternoon displays.

We have print of sheep
and dog, and cow,
and now me, this passing man.
I am counting colours, wild daffodils,
and anemone,
I am counting too, the moons,
leapfrogging to the dream
of May and June,
when this meadow swells
with riot of wild flower, and a quake
of dusty heat, when the grasses
tease our knees, and the so soft breeze
paints long, lazy waves across
the verdant lea.

But for now,
we test these cold puddles
and the deep mud with our stick,
jab concentric, spreading ripples
before we cross,
then, stepping gingerly

upon those more solid clumps
of reed, we trust our trousers
might yet avoid
the wash.

April 2024

A Dead Boy's Face

I see him out and about
in the hills, from time to time.
And though I know him by sight
he's kind of mind-blind,
and never remembers me.

Too good a day to be in, he roars.
His usual opening,
a hale and hearty type, a little fierce.
He's already hurled an expletive,
like a hand grenade.
His chest expands,
and his gravel voice takes flight.

He laments some sorry youth
at home, gestures with his thumbs,
mimes a computer game.
Like that, he says.
He said this last time too.
Wasting his effing life.
Bang! Another grenade.
Next breath, the same:
When I was in the Paras,...

Oh, he looks the type. Tough, I mean.
Tough enough for that maroon beret.
An old man now, for sure,
old enough for the Falklands,
I guess. Paras two and three.
We sent them there,
hard, fighting men, to kill, you see.
They killed conscripted boys
with bayonets.

The hills were calm,
but then he comes, roaring up.
He is a Helm wind blowing,
same old stories,
full of certainty and knowing,
F this, F that.

But there's something else.
I hear it in his unsettled tone,
See it in his agitated pace.
This man is hunted by his demons,
And in his eyes, I see reflected,
a dead boy's face.

April 2024

Sallows, sight unseen

We drive up Browfoot Lane,
dead ended, alarmingly narrow,
and rutted, no places to pass.
You'd have to back up for miles.
And at the top, just the one place
to leave a car.

Already brushing the clouds here,
we approach invisible fells
along a deep puddled track.
It's flooded in places, ditch to ditch.
A strange landscape, half water,
reflecting light and sky.
And it's raining.

An hour, and we're
in the mind-spinning mist,
with gales, boots overtopped,
streams in spate, white water charging.

Finger-smudge of a path, now
over glistening grass, and steep.
It climbs skywards, into shifting grey.
The hill bites, up to Cappel How.

Wild beck at hand, a torrent of rapids.
Bleak, forbidding. But there is beauty in it.
Useless mobile phone photograph,
soft and blurred, no contrasts.
You'd need a Leica, or a Hasselblad.
We might tease something out with AI,
fake a watercolour, perhaps.

Dripping drystone wall, our guide, now,
and clung to like blind mice.
Misted spectacles, beaded raindrops
inside and out, render the way lost
in the time and space of human certainty.

We lean into the poles, now and then,
feel the water swill around our toes,

catch a breath, and press on.

A dozen misty hummocks, now.
One of them Sour Howes.
Who cares which?
We could be up Rivington Pike
For all we know.

Waterproofs are breached.
Saturated, the wind driving it through.
Cold legs, cold feet,
and the path still a smudge.

Marsh marigolds in profusion, lower down,
but here, nothing. Just sour grass
and bog, and the wind.
We vault the ominous deeps
with poles set high.
Crouch low, now and then,
check the GPS, and the map.

Still on course for Sallows?
It is a theoretical concept
on days like this,
objectives claimed sight unseen.
Are we there yet?
And when does the descent begin?

Heart, lungs, legs, all of them an ache.
And the rain. Hell, the rain this year
has done me no good.
Snatch up the time, check the map.
Fine, here we are, a low outcrop,
an island amid a sea of mud.
Yes, we've made it up Sallows. So what?
Visibility a few yards.
There is just us, and the small bubble
of immediate experience.

Back now. Back the way we've come.
But slow. Slow. Watch your feet.
This is when it can all go wrong,
a slip, a missed way in the mist,
careless descent to the wrong valley.

Anything to get out of the weather.

Fear. Yes, there's a frisson of that.
Scent of mountain and marsh,
the struggle against the body's
cravings for comfort.
The dream of a hot bath
with a glass of whiskey on my chest,
Bach on the player.

Those drowned lanes we stepped around,
so gingerly? We backtrack them now,
and wade them, dead centre, carelessly,
wet to the skin, boots soft as chamois.

The car's still there. Thank God.
Not washed away.
Change into dry socks, climb in.
Crank up the heater.
Head back down the lane, to Staveley,
sit shivering with coffee
in a café that's closing, even at four
on a Friday afternoon.
They Hoover round our feet.
Three pounds for the hour to park.
Gotcha.

Senses overwhelmed by impressions,
we'll be days unravelling all of this,
this walk up Sallows,
sight unseen.

Eight and a half miles,
eighteen hundred feet of ascent.
We're resting today.

April 2024

The last of them

Are these the last of them, I wonder,
gathered on this sunny afternoon?
Well-dressed, come to dine,
the final generation
before the turning of the tide.

Have they come to say goodbye
to what their children will not know?
They have money for fripperies,
electric cars, fine clothes.

See that woman over there,
dressed like a flower child
or a faded millionaire?
I've seen her face in old photos,
bare-boobed, at Woodstock,
or was it the Isle of Wight?
Where did all that spirit go?

Unlike the staff with painted smiles,
these folks knew good money.
They sit pretty in houses
paid off long ago.
Yes, the last of a generation
with deep pockets,
while in the wings,
the care homes lurk
like salivating wolves,
to take the fallen,
strip the fruits of all their labours,
one by one.

But for now, they sit like royalty,
consult their menus,
speak of how it used to be.
And for this lunchtime, at least,
they blind-eye the changes
poised to sweep them all away.

So spend it, folks. Don't give a damn.
Laugh. The hour is getting late.

You are the last of us brought up
on promises of sunshine and of plenty,
while now the bag lies empty
but for these come-lately disappointments,
and the incitement to division,
and hate.

May 2024

She did it anyway

Perhaps she did not mean to break the world.
It was just a step, she thought,
to somewhere else.
It was a slick career move,
buoyed upon the shoulders
of a carefully cultivated popularity.

She had calculated
and triangulated opinion,
courted her sponsors, paid the yes men,
pulled the triggers of the culture wars,
She had smeared the naysayers
and the experts with adroitness,
had them spread-eagled
on the front pages
and stoned,
as devils.

She had eroded faith
in the institutions,
dismantled brick by brick all trust,
advocated for apathy among the many,
appointed the thuggish as her captains.

No, perhaps she did not mean to break the world
It just seemed there for the breaking
and the taking, and none could stop her,
so she did it anyway.

May 2024

Forever come and gone

Quickly comes Midsummer, then is gone,
its promise, long cherished,
a warm thought, held close,
a thing to see us through
the shuddering winter,
through gales and flood.

We remember summer doors flung wide,
letting out the damp,
and the accumulated mould-scented breath
of endless rains.

Ah,… June, midsummer, so long anticipated,
already come, and gone.

July now, swelling with weed and green.
Can we not slow down the year?
There has been too little done and seen,
yet the slide of light begins,
towards those amber nights,
and August's harvest moon.

Crisping then, the days
of September and October.
We tell ourselves their joy,
their colour is in the eye
and in the heart of the beholder.
But November softens,
and the rains wash back
the bolder hues,
bares the trees to bones.
Brittle fingers then
to scratch the sky, without impression.
Midsummer, the promise
forever come and gone.

July 2024

Lest you be disturbed, and wake

Darkness surrounds you now,
while we, the night-ghouls prowl.
We press at your windows,
make sure you're asleep.
We have convinced you it is normal,
I mean, to snuggle down like that
in bubbles of weak lamplight.

We have persuaded you,
that down is up, and inside out,
that to be awake is to be asleep,
and to be asleep, awake.
Yes, yes,... it is normal things
should be this way.
So there you are, locked in, asleep,
while we monsters strut your world.

Bare faced, we no longer need disguise.
We have convinced you of the obsolescence
of what is true. Indeed, we're wise enough
to have consigned all that untidiness
to myth.

To myth you say?
Yes, it was just something,
you used to believe in, as children,
something spoken of
by your parents, and revered
in the stories they read to you.
Or at least it was an aspiration.

But what is it anyway?
Such a tired old thing,
and hard to define, you know.
So why trouble yourself.
You might as well be happy,
than go seeking it alone.
So, trust us, don't just live the lie,
become the lie as well.

Whatever happens

in this darkness, it isn't true.
The horrors you see unfolding,
they didn't happen,
or they happened,
but it wasn't us who did it,
It was someone else.
No, we didn't enable them,
or stand idly by while they did it.
Well, we did, but we couldn't help it,
and you would understand all that,
if you could see the bigger picture,
this lost portrait of a truth, this myth
that is no longer true.
And anyway, we did it all for you,
so you can sleep on, untroubled
by all these things we do.

Not true then, no, not true
this troubled darkness, all around,
not true, these dead children,
pulled by grieving parents,
from mound upon mound,
of dust and still smouldering rubble.

Go quietly now, do not disturb,
we ghouls who roam this dark.
Let us go about our business
while you sleep, and pray your dreams
be comfortable lies as well,
lest you be disturbed from them,
and wake.

July 2024

On the edge of Autumn

On this, the autumn's edge, we realise
all those things we never did,
and which we forward to a future now
that might not be ours to live.

On the other side of gales and rain,
and winter's wailing wall,
we must once more wait in darkness
the coming summer's siren call.

But knowing all too well
it is a race too swiftly run,
that the coming summer shall be over
before it's even begun.

We must embrace each coming season
whatever it may be,
and walk each day its ways regardless
and cherish all we see.

August 2024

Blue moons and silent sun blessed days

Through these late season storms, was my Love lost?
Now the nights draw in, and I am feeling blind.
Only on blue moons, and silent, sun blessed days like these,
does Love's haunting presence come once more to mind.

I wonder, was it something I imagined?
Think back now, did She ever speak my name?
Has the quest these years been nothing but illusion?
A folly, for which I've only myself to blame?

I remember clearly midnight in a forest,
drawn there, moth like, by the lamp light's lovely glow.
And there was a table, at which I sat long in the waiting
for someone from a dream, called Eleanor.

It was a rendezvous to which I was invited.
For sure, I swear I did not force my way,
and there I lingered, oh,.. from midnight until morning,
when a cold mist rose, at breaking of the day.

Thus it was, I left that forest in confusion.
Had I been awake, or slept the whole night through?
Did I imagine her solemn mark upon me?
Or might I go from here, and trust my instincts to be true?

Oh, so long now, and so much stony ground surrendered.
Two shadows, moving o'er this haunted shadow land,
and me, always several steps behind her,
forever reaching for the comfort of her hand.

But I've found by far the way of Love is lonesome,
except for blue moons, and silent, sun-blessed days like these,
when I fancy she will pause awhile, look back and whisper,
"Just one step more, my love. Please don't give up, on me."

September 2024

The ghost of time's obsession

There is no clock time now,
no machine to measure out my days,
yet time, ticks anyway, just the same,
in a lame attempt to satisfy
that one prize 'completion' always craves.

And yes, still, there's the sense
it might be won,
if we could hold back time,
and thereby finish what we thought
we'd once, so long ago, begun.

You see, the wheels of mind,
when uncoupled
from that mad meshing drive
of the grinding world,
at first, they coast untethered,
and with such a giddy joy.
But by degrees, they run down,
until the doings of an old-world hour,
take much, much longer than before.

Thus, a blur of days, of weeks,
turns into years of little gain.
And in the void between there breeds
the same old ragged fears, the
ghosts of time, those spectres of incompletion,
nag, nag, nagging in your ears.

And worse, they claim the gap,
grows wide for want of energetic drive.
Yet what use was that old-world engine, anyway?

Have we forgotten it was blind,
push, push, pushing all before it, and to where?
We could not choose.
And of all its damned priorities
in not a single one could we believe,
nor say for sure we'd win,
but only lose of ourselves
a little more each day.

So, do we seek another way?
Might we, even groping blind,
ignite that engine of obsession,
of the independent mind?
Or do we let it go, and hold instead,
to the heart's abiding rule,
close more with what we most resist,
in stillness, and call out that ghost
of time's obsession, for the sorry fool it is.

October 2024

Until the desert blooms again

Is this as far as we can go, old friend?
Did I somewhere lose our way?
And is it too far to backtrack, now?
When was it, pray, we left behind
the forest's riches? Remember those?
Those counsels of the wise?
And the power to listen, of course,
when nowadays my eyes just glaze,
and slide over everything
that was ever written.

When was it, then, our path led to this desert place?
When did our days become so tired, so dry?
I know, you say there'll be an oasis, up ahead,
palm fronded, 'neath a tranquil azure sky,
and still waters to reflect the sun.
Will there be a cabin, too, for shade?
And therein, safe, shall we abide
all our days remaining, roaming done?

Tell me, what have we learned along the way?
Was it so very much, or nothing?
In truth, I cannot say, but suspect
it's more like nothing,
since I cannot put it into words.
Indeed, it seems to me
it was more a sweet forgetting.
We endured so much, and all of it absurd.

All right, I know I'm pressing now,
and you've always been a patient guide.
And I recognise my urgency is not a virtue,
Indeed, it's what most likely led us to this end.
So, let us bide here awhile in stillness,
or at least until the coming of the rains,
and the way ahead is washed once more clear for us,
and this endless waste of desert blooms again.

October 2024

The passing moment

I walk a familiar route,
blind, hurried with contempt,
not expecting anything new.
The earth is black, fresh-ploughed.
Thorn hedgerows run bare,
grey as steel, and spiked.

Mist fades out the far,
masks the messy feel,
this criss-cross of power-lines
and the unlovely pylons,
astride the moss.

But then I see the oak,
against the sky,
I must have passed this way
a hundred times
and not once has it taken my eye.
Not like today, by quirk of light,
and the gold of autumnal grace.
At once, it arrests my hurried,
shambling pace.

Camera!
Oh, quick, before the light fades!
“Ha! You’ve forgotten the card,” the camera says
and it teases me for good measure,
with an accusing bleep.
Still, smug, I counter that past forgetfulness
is the mother of invention,
and thus I delve for the spare
I always keep in my wallet.

I seek it deep now, only to discover,
the defeat of good intention,
for the wallet, I have left behind as well.

So the light goes, and the tree fades back
no longer proud.
It was the revelation of a moment,
gone to disappointment.
But now at day's end,
I need only close my eyes
to see the tree afresh, with ease,
and with supernatural clarity,
and a presence no photograph
could ever freeze.

It swells vividly,
the essence of that moment
enhanced, I'm sure, by the subjective
post-processing of imagination.
No, a picture is not the same,
quite flat, and tame,
compared with the sense of knowing
such a thing will never come again.

November 2024

An Immense Complexity

We have raised,
from once hidden depths
a monster of immense complexity,
unaware it is an image of ourselves,
and was always there,
a reflection long concealed
behind veils of a blissful ignorance.

And now we quail before it, paralysed
by indecision, division and despair,
seeking our champions
from amongst those wide-boys
who boast of simplistic certainty,
while levitating themselves grandly
upon vast, billowing up-draughts
of their own hot air.

November 2024

Seeking Memoria

The old year, winding down now,
worn by rage of storms,
despair of overtopping floods,
enters weary the silty reeds
and the stillness
of a washed out overcast.

Of the affairs of men, it has been
another long Shakespearian tale
told by idiots, trumpeted,
echoed wide and far
by our sound-boxes.
Idle hands to scroll
the devil's work. It irks
we have no better songs,
nor the bards to sing.

So we turn out our pockets,
come bedtime, seeking memoria.
It's mostly fluff and shrapnel,
but some treasured trinkets too:
Springtime in the Upper Wharfe.
The Bleasedale fells.
A squally summer by Bassenthwaite,
A snowy day, on the Pike,
And Dales runs, with the top down.

Pray, let it be of these things
we dream into the quiet
of a solstice night
and take them with us,
to decorate the new,

leave the idiots adrift
and far from view.

December 2024

2025

A sudden and immense urgency

Of a sudden there arises
an immense urgency
from this, the once slumbering leaf-mould
of a sublime serenity.
It is a fruiting of alarm,
great spore clouds
spreading a strange and nameless dubiosity.
it is the rantings of a ruthless revolutionary
amplified by the twittering trumpet snake
to shake and break
the windows of the world.
And where there was once a warm oblivion,
a cold wind now enters,
to settle with a dendritic frost
upon the once homely hearth
of our better imaginings.

January 2025

A storm's reckoning

On this tempestuous day
the earth gathers up what we already know,
and does it to us all the more.
Here, the ocean has always delivered rain,
but now it rains much more.
Black clouds, dense with anger,
unleash a load on shaggy hills,
still sponge-soaked
from all the tempests gone before.

And the wind has always blown,
so it blows, now, all the more.
It shrieks across this, our red-alerted land,
driving all before it, bending trees,
levelling the loose plantings, where they stand,
and all those vain creations built in haste,
our shallow labours, laid to waste.

And still the wind blows,
roaring in our empty hearths,
speaking in tongues of sin,
while unwholesome waters,
stained by hubristic excrescence,
lap the doorsteps, threatening,
then overtopping, and flooding in.

Yes, the earth takes all of that,
and ratchets up anew,
Preparing to do it all again, but more.
And each time in the calm between,
we smile and caution
our alarm's a mistake,

unable to admit it was us
who first stirred this monster
wide awake.

January 2025

These midnight years

How soon have the generations forgotten?
The shock of past terrors fades,
and with it the collective guilt,
at a million ways to murder.

The swagger is all that remains, now,
and the seductive power.
It thrills anew, promising to shatter,
to break clean through
the stagnation of these midnight years,
and the long ebb-tide of immiseration.

And there's the echo of history,
how the thieves, and the brutes
and the starry elites are first-come
with their heel-clicking salutes.

And then, like our brothers and sisters,
veterans of dark terrors past,
no doubt, smug, we'll assume
they'll only be after that 'othered' few.
But then who shall stop them
from coming for you?

January 2025

The treasures we have chosen

How cautiously we've tiptoed all our lives,
afraid, yet scorning these legions
of the waking dead?
No wonder none shall know our names,
nor recall a single word we've ever said.
And now we sense the nights are drawing in -
too late then, to think of starting out again.
But would we really choose another way?
Have we not talked at length?
Have we not had our say?
And was it not Fate that laid the way?
the stony ground?
the fallow lands?
and the wilderness unbound?
But for all that, have we not grown?
Our souls - made them our own?
Was all that just stubbornness and delusion,
or have we seen through the illusion of our art?
That those inner selves we've woven
are the treasures we have chosen,
And the riches we take with us,
when we depart.

March 2025

Whispers of morphogenesis

I dream of pebbles tossed into still waters.
Some are sent skipping.
A sly, hooked finger adds a mischievous touch of spin,
a lively skim, to break the mirror calm.

I feel the energy, a quick burst,
but poorly aimed and short-lived.
It settles quickly into somnambulance.
And now I watch as ripples spread,
from small centres of concentric stillness,
each one, a seed of chaotic interference.

And within this overlay of waveforms
we seek patterns of an inner coherence,
whispers from the morphogenesis of all things.

But with tired eyes, unfocused,
though the heart is willing,
we miss the vital beat of eternity,
and the patterns settle back once more,
to a mirrored calm, and the reflection
of a world arising out of nothing.

March 2025

Setting camp

Stepping out in brand new clothing,
I pass my younger self, dishevelled.
He's making camp, in a meadow,
settling down for the night.
He has a stout tent,
like a Victorian explorer.
There are lanterns hung,
to melt the fall of darkness.
Burly hedgerows surround
to shoulder the weather.

But it's early yet, and the light,..
the light is golden,
and those distant hills so green!
I press on, with a burst of vigour.
How I hope he sees
the way it carries me up the hill.

But then, beyond,
there lies another way,
and hills beyond that.
And the way,...
it narrows to nothing.
What use this vigour now
If I cannot set foot
twixt fence and gate?
And then, so soon, the hour
is growing late.

What use, benighted here
I realise, without abode?
And not the sense to see

The way was bound to close,
and me cock sure
in all these fancy clothes,
and how wise my younger self had been.
Good fortune then that he,...
is also me.

May 2025

Impasto shards

Lake front retail palace
empty now for years,
stands sentinel on the waterfront,
its reflection shaken
to impasto shards of memory,
proxy for a song of better times.

When was that, I wonder?
When did those doors last swing
and the tills ring? And when was the air
perfumed with the confidence
and mystique of opulence?

It was a fallacy, I know,
no measure of the spirit
how the money flows.
We were bankrupt then,
as now, it's just that now we've lost
the illusion of our fancy clothes.

There’s just this lake front retail palace
empty now for years,
and a few snatched bars of song,
once thinly sung, while out on the water
there, among those impasto shards,
swans dabble
and the geese raise their young.

May 2025

Corner Cafe Man

Corner café man, lone chess,
Plays both sides but always loses
Be it black or white, he chooses.
Yet see, those hands?
They were surely meant to bless.

Still, he lacks all conversation.
And with that grey ghost on his shoulder,
Those of us who might draw closer
Fear more the revelation:
What else has he in store
As he watches o'er his board
And with such powers of concentration.

Thus, the light begins to dim,
And his bitter coffee cools,
While he counts alone his moves,
And all the wins that weren’t,
But might have been.

May 2025

What Thunder This?

What thunder this that breaks the calm of day?
What age of loss, enthroned by darkling kings,
While I abide where moonlit shadows play,
And silence weaves my soul its sacred wings?

What world forgets the language of the deep?
What world is this that elevates the crass,
While I still dream where daemons do not sleep,
And silent guides attend me as I pass?

What grips this world was never mine to own.
What stirs the leaf out-bides the writ of man.
Yet still I count the inner stars of old,
Where lives the pattern of the Master's plan.

A sovereign, wielding not the sword but grace.
A Self whom I alone shall one day face.

June 2025

The Narrow Way

How then shall we seize back
this darkening of the way,
when the times are thick with talk
of rupture, and the end of days?

No wise old men abroad
to cast their light upon a path more true,
nor the narrow way remaining
to bridge this gulf 'twixt me and you.

Shall we then shout into the blaze,
storm loud with cryptic certainties?
No. There is no trumpet for the soul,
no herald waiting in the square -
only the sigh of a gentle wind,
whispering poems in the air.

For wisdom comes not trailing glory,
nor awaits our story's end;
it walks beside us always, shadow-soft.
It bides its time, and waits its turn
to once more be our friend.

June 2025

The Mist Clears

The mist clears, and we see
a vast machine.
Around it sit the tellers of stories.
They have small heads
and big mouths.
We once thought them wise,
but all they've ever done
is keep this vast machine from view.

It is a machine of poisons and knives,
and all the deadly tricks.
It weaves for us
this tapestry of blameless lives –
of green hills, and cricket, and warm beer –
from the bones of dead children.

And we say 'how beautiful'.

For each of us, isolated and alone,
dare not whisper what we've seen,
fearful of the machine's Medusa stare –
and those ever-busy tellers
who would render us in stone.

Where then the shield of Perseus?
Where then the truth and grace –
and the burnished mirror held up
to the machine's infernal face?

Or is it not Medusa's stare
that petrifies
But what she hides?

A truth, too terrible to bear.

July 2025

Twixt Blood and Rose

I waited in blood,
not knowing whose,
if it was mine, perhaps,
or if it belonged to the world.

No dreams for now,
only a darkening of mood.

Brittle shards in ragged breaths,
a growling voice by day,
tossed and turned by night
and a burning desire to vault the gates,
and run, speak to no one.

But then a softness comes,
scent of rose and sweet pea.
No petals yet,
just this ache of anticipation,
before they open to the light.

Let us then not call the dream,
not just yet,
but make room for it.

Let Venus come in her own season,
unhurried and free.

July 2025

All of our eternities

I am sitting where I have sat before.
The time is both then, and now,
An eternal present.
And me,
Perched upon this rock,
jutting from a green hill,
Old as time.

I rest from weariness,
Take respite from the path's
relentless climb,
As I took it then,
That sweet September morning
Like this one.

And I feel the same,
Decisions taken in rumination,
And now the living consequence,
Merged as one, balanced
in rounded completion.

The thought, the deed,
And the timeless rock,
My witness.
And the view,
A world down there,
An autumn crisping vale –
And trees, surrendered to a hazy sun
Their leaves touched
By first hints of gold
With inked outlines.

They are changing,
as I am changed,
Yet remain the same,
Cognisant of every move
In this eternal now.
Aware of thought and memory.
The collapse of linearity,
Into singularity.
Into an immeasurable moment,
Spanning all of our eternities.

August 2025

On Hodder Bank Fell

Wind-waves in moorgrass.
Silver tides rise and fall,
among the heather –
not in profusion,
but enough to share
that precious breath of honey.

The Hodder runs,
a gentle chatter
through meadow and rain.
I walk unknown,
neither hunter nor herdsman,
just like the weather,
passing quietly today
over these late summer hills.

August 2025

What was whispered once

In what safe box shall we keep
this precious secret?
And then what place to hide,
that it might ride this darkness
and beyond, into a far future time?
A time when man might seek once more
what we of old from ghostly whispers gleaned.

It is scant harvest from the age, I know,
and in such a gentle language conveyed.
Might our soft words no longer resonate
for want of jewelled key, and silver tongue?

Or will they too have glimpsed eternity
in the laced wing of the honey bee?
Or in the cool caress of morning mist,
upon green mountainsides?
Or in the fall of snow as it softly hides
and reshapes the forms of all we thought we knew?

And if all that is true, then we might burn the box,
for whichever way they turn, and turn again,
the secret shall be revealed,
and what was whispered once to us of old,
shall once more be whispered to them.

August 2025

Poems for Eleanor

No, pilgrim I do not write these lines for you,
nor do I seek companionship –
and just as well, since you don't seek mine, not really
though I'm sure your heart is true.

Neither do we offer one another balms to heal.
Only in me you sense perhaps, a cipher –
a key to stories of your own beginning,
and an ending you have lately come to feel.

And your mirror fogged, so long ago, it's true –
as did mine. So we can no longer see our own face,
nor would we know it if we did.
So, no pilgrim, I do not write these words for you.

In truth, I am waiting in this forest of the velvet night,
Waiting, and writing... writing poems for Eleanor –
she of the Moon, and Venus, while wrapped warm
in this bubble of soft lamp-light.

Oh, I thought that she would come,
step out of the dark and stay.
So many years I've waited now,
but she never promised.
Go deep, was all she said, and write to me,
and I will show to you the way.

For hers is a path not easily shared.
She knows what we do not.
But when at last our visions meet
I trust she will call me home to her.

August 2025

More than words

I don't know what world she lived in,
nor yet the language that she spoke.
It was a kind of English nonsense,
but pleasant, like a babbling brook.

Don't disturb him, dear, her husband said
and then he stroked her hand.
I think she felt his gentleness,
and smiled sweetly at his command.

But then she spoke some more to me
and I assured him it was fine.
She was a happy bubbling soul
so, really, how could I mind?

And at times I felt I understood.
It was like she spoke the language of the heart –
not words as such, but cadences,
which from the world set us apart.

She spoke of far horizons,
where the earth and heavens entwine,
and where the structures that we hold to
soften at the kiss of the divine.

Oh, I'm sure he finds her difficult,
as surely, so would I,
for the place that she inhabits
functions quite outside of time.

As he leads her gently then away
she turns and waves her hand.

And I smile in recognition of an insight:
The heart speaks more than words command.

August 2025

Reality Slipping

Flicking through life, never once alighting,
and why should we,
when something more exciting
might be just another flick away?
Why settle, read, and waste the day,
when you can flip and skip, light as air,
never pausing anywhere?

Too lazy to move, to check the post,
to boil the kettle, to butter the toast.
Instead we flick and scroll and skip,
while days dissolve and nights are lit
by blue-screen glow; we chase the dawn,
only to find the whole world gone.

And for all our scrolling, flipping, skipping,
we never felt reality slipping.

August 2025

Small change but noted

Too soon is the season spent.
This quake of August exhausts
both man and beast.
And even the trees are tiring
leaves crisping,
into a premature autumn sleep.

Meanwhile we seek a sharpness of vision
the time to see, and the air to breathe,
the moor, abuzz with honey bee,
and aromatic sweeps of heather
as, dust dry, we pass.

And from Mercurius, a coin –
small change, but noted,
and a secret kept, passed on.
Prelude to an encounter
with the sidhe.

August 2025

Sophia Incognita

You look so elegant,
in your long black gown.
Pencil thin, you dress
for sophisticated discourse,
a concert perhaps, or an opera –
things beyond my ken,
the distance between us.

What are we to make of it?
This gathering of soul-fragments,
here, in a far away Tyrolean town.
The calm before an incoming storm, they say.
Have we been here before, I wonder?
There are shades of "The Last Guests"

Meanwhile, our tidy hosts make haste
and courteous welcome.
There is both containment, and preparation.
And we, for now, fated companions.
Yet you, remote in your authority,
your beauty, and seeming royal to me.

I will love you of course.
Has that not always been my way?
But I shall keep the boundary you've set.
You are neither nurse nor lover,
but guide perhaps –
Initiatrix to the higher realms.
I shall try not to let us down.

August 2025

Last Orders

The words were written long ago,
dusty now, by names revered
yet lost to time.
Like mythical heroes, they seem
no longer quite true.

Once prophets, now background noise,
their legacy drowned
in the hubris of an age
we still imagine golden.

Even as a nation falls,
observed in real time.
The stones tumble,
the monsters take the stage.
And here we are, laughing,
ordering another round,
spinning the night away.

So has it always been?
Hearts too small
for both joy and dread.
Until the clouds take the sun,
and the landlord calls,
with a baleful sigh…
Last orders.

August 2025

Looking back

You make such a lovely ghost,
coming to me as you were, back then,
so young, so warm,
and a smile to melt the heart.
You sensed a need in me, I think,
and wondered how far to push.

It was true, when I said
it was good to see you.
It felt good, yes, tingly good.
Perhaps then you misunderstood,
or thought to press some more,
just making sure.

Catch up sometime, did you ask?
Oh... that would be lovely,
and it would, really, were I not
so far down this other path.

And the measure of my journey?
It's what – forty years?
Seeing each other now
for real, for sure,
would be a shock to us both.

And I know it's not really you,
that you are just this avatar
of soul-making. Fairy. Sprite.
Sent to what? To test?
Or to illuminate?
Too late... too late.

And what is this now?
This vision forming, of an old man...
Is he thinking back and longing
for connection, for paths not taken?

I understand. I feel the sadness there.
It is to be respected.
But I am granted the insight now,
it weakens too the dignity of years,
for the sake of a warm sunset.
Is it not more soulful then to keep on,
than look back with misplaced fondness,
even if it shall be alone?

September 2025

Like Autumn Leaves

How do I resist you?
How do I render null
the violence that you do?
Certainly not by matching like for like.
Indeed to fight you is to swell my heart
with blackness.
And you would only laugh,
and spread the more your blood
and broken bones.

Shall I capture you, instead?
Here, in this box for all to see.
Note how I do not call down invective.
Nor a curse upon your head.
The gods know what you are,
and in what book,
to write your name.

And so it is with gentleness,
I sweep you up,
embody you with craft,
then set you down again
to moulder back to nothing
with the autumn leaves.

September 2025

Openings

Surrounding me, I sense now
the gateways, the apertures,
to a deeper knowing.
Beyond every familiar surface,
an opening of soul,
not commensurate
with my own narrow concepts
of space and time.

And is it here I see you now,
furtive in your exploring of this place,
while fragments of an unknown self -
our Self - walks on by?

And is it nourishment you seek here,
yet not to raise alarm?
But then how can we otherwise?
When jangling our clumsy coinage,
tarnished currencies of past exchange.

I'm sorry how I've treated you,
dressed you in this shallow glamour,
in past times, and in my dreams
sought only to make love,
instead of other consummations,
for all I called you 'guide'.

Lead us deeper then,
and I shall follow, in trust.
Though I shall still love you.
For has that not always been my way?

September 2025

I still forget

How can it be I still remember?
It was a passing glance – no more,
yet an opening on love's deeps.
Such a warm melting, and an ache
of sweet longing.

Here, you said... no words,
take this key
that it might unlock wonders.
Then you will see, and remember,
it has always been this way.

And yes – I do remember.
At least from time to time,
and with such clarity.
Yet how can it be, so often,
and with such ease,
I still forget?

September 2025

Forgetting the gods

I watch while the machines
accelerate beyond our knowing,
as we regress to the status
of an ignorant people,
frightened, alone.
We are neither before
nor beyond reason,
yet calcified in hubris,
suspended long years
in the petrifying wells
of inadequate imagination.
We have forgotten our gods,
their faces, their forms, their names.
Now they infect us with diseases
for which we know no cure.

September 2025

Uncoupling

What is it, lately come over me?
It feels like an uncoupling,
like, as I sit here,
amid this chattering crowd,
I am of a sudden faded out.
Invisible.

Are these my people?
I would have known them once.
But no more.
Now they are strange to me.
Disconnected.
Drifting far away.

Oh, I know I've been a long time
in another place,
a place where things hold such meaning,
while here it seems nothing
means anything at all.

Yet this is where I breathe,
where the body functions
and the years pass.

Am I then to live with one foot here,
the other there?
A double vision, overlaid?
Perhaps only then,
and from a distance,
will this crowd
seem beautiful again.

September 2025

Faceless

Few have known me,
I mean... not really.
To really know me is to read me,
And not many have, or will.
But those who have, I thank them
for their kinship.
You know who you are.

I suppose I have always been two.
The one people think they know,
and the one they don't.
The one who must engage,
make way, put on a face,
say what I am supposed to say.
And then the other,
faceless as I have always been.

There is a sense
we're not supposed to call it.
I mean the way we see it.
Not if we're to earn our keep,
that we maintain the illusion.

But know also this:
I have sought and found, and loved
what's truly genuine in this world.
I have known its beauty,
and some of it has loved me back.
Just not the parts I expected.
I suppose that's always the way.

Go safe, my friends, my kindred.

Go free, and don't be afraid
to love.

September 2025

The last to Fall

First day of October, now,
and they're harvesting the maize.
Always the last to fall.
The meadows are dusty
in low sunlight,
as the tractors roar,
working in frantic pairs,
to service this voracious machine.

A long season in the growing,
now shredded, sweet scented
on the breeze.
And a meadow stripped back
to pale stalks, left to cower
against the teeth of winter –
slowly then decaying
into a bare earth,
puddled with rains.

Thus do we bear witness
to a race against light
and time,
and the first frosts.
No doubt there'll be a fresh moon
when next we pass this way.

October 2025

Repairing to Urbania

I have repaired now to Urbania.
Flags mark this as a Faragist town.
But neither accent nor dress
betray my foreignness here.
I shall pass unseen.

It was like this in Derry once -
Still is, I'm told. Jack or Tricolour?
The price of a bullet.
Not here, of course. Not yet.

For there is no opposition -
No counter-colour.
There is only this tacit acceptance
of a changing world.

How do I like my coffee?
Rich or smooth?
Yes, I'll take a blueberry muffin with that,
and settle here awhile,
in branded parody of hipster calm.

Cord trousers and Harris tweed.
Am I the only one who sees the flags?
And reads in them a future
flirting with a troubled past.

October 2025

Touching Grass

I used to make things.
Now, I walk these meadows,
touching grass.
Both real and imagined.

Palms down, fingers splayed,
I snag the waist-high drooping heads –
the texture of rabbit's tails, and crow's foot.

Such vast landscapes these,
places of presence, and past.
Imagination too, of course,
like the sheep cropped fields,
dewy-sweet, that lick my boots, now,
to a varnished glaze.

And those fresh mown swards,
scented of all the homes I've ever known,
where, eyes gently closed,
I am returned to other versions of myself –
boy and man, callow youth
and would-be sage.

Yet it was once the all of me,
to fashion, to shape and change,
to alter this world in my own image.
But it's here lies
the greater authenticity,
and a nameless soul-meaning,
in the feel, imagined and otherwise…

Of the touch of grass

October 2025

Brown Shoelaces

The world feels out of synch today.
It folds in upon itself, and turns its back,
as I search in vain for brown shoelaces.

It offers me white or black, and flat –
these for training shoes, I suppose.
But I want cable, and quality, waxed,
for country brogues.

I search the town
until weariness sends me home,
shamed by the unreasonableness
of my flowery wants.

The world is not in the mood for me today,
as I am not receptive to the abundance
of its offhanded alternatives.

I shall order some from Ebay, instead.
Free delivery from the digital void,
mid-wifed by a battered van,
a datamatrixed package
dropped without ceremony.
No longer the treasure
of a need met by a world ensouled.

November 2025

On Days Like This

I thought I might have had the morning,
but the rain came on early,
beading heavily on the windscreen as I drove.
The wipers flicked it off, but in the pause,
the rain settled back more heavily than before.
And my spirit, only half awake, dissolved,
so I turned the car around.

I came home through my old home town,
seeming dark in this November light.
I passed the newsagents where, long ago
I bought my comics.
Gone for a tanning parlour now.
And the bus stop where I used to wait,
still sends a chill:

Ribble Buses to school,
daily exiled to the periphery of a small world.
And seeming not that much bigger now.
Oh, how they used to frighten me,
those schooldays.
Workdays too, if truth be told.

I view it with the feeling of a survivor,
looking back in anger
at a world forever grey,
dim-lit like this, and drizzling rain.

And now my freedom,
though ever so timidly embraced.
I wonder why.
Should I not be more triumphant?

Yet still the spirit cowers,
clouds the vision, at least it does
on days like this.

November 2025

A Broken Umbrella

So here we are, eh?
Pressed up against the rails
waiting for the main feature to start,
though, yes, it might already have begun.
Hard to tell now, isn't it?
I mean the signal from the noise.
Then that hard rain hammering down
and my umbrella, sadly broken,
trodden into rags by this careless crowd.
Yet still, I raise it, click the button,
and it unfolds bravely, for all its wounds,
still big enough, I'd say
to restore a little faded dignity.
And you there at my elbow,
shivering and unsure,
might you not inch a fraction closer?
It's true, what I have lacks all perfection,
but what little it is, it pleases me
to share with you.

December 2025

Declarations and expectations

The bitter-sweetness of an infinite longing
tempts once more a morbid hanging on.
Old energy from that unconsummated emptiness,
a source of heady power, yes,
but also an imprisonment.

It is a fevered incarceration,
locked in solitary darkness.
And there long have I circled, decades long,
the abyss of you, soft blanket of abiding,
safe in your unspoken infinity.

From where came the courage, then?
This mindful shift, this firm refusal
of the same old road?
The moonlight, the midnight way,
barefoot over cinders and stone,
long days of bruised tenderness...

It was not from any level of my known being.
Such insight has always been elusive.
It was surely then that inner twin –
silent witness to all my follies.
Wiser, well travelled.
It was she who gifted the courage
of release.

From New Moon then, to midday sun,
and from the silence of that smothering abyss,
she rose first as the song and dance I once was,
but fought back, for those demands
I feared I could not sustain.

And then the return of clean shirts and shoes
on school-day mornings –
oh, so many details, small in nature
yet looming large,
all taken care of.
A warm hand to my back –
just do the work, she says.
I've got this. It'll be okay.

And then she is the golden one, reborn,
rich food for thought and deed,
both of us a long time travelling apart,
and in the mean time,
herself restored to such a robustness,
and glamour.

A firm embrace, a welcome,
and, doled out upon my plate,
such generous helpings of confidence.
How much she loves me, she says,
her tone, a declaration –

but an expectation, too.

December 2025

The Archivist of Endings

There is no substance here,
the record sleeve is empty,
its value a mere abstraction
of cover-art, of vinyl –
a limited edition.
Worth a bit, they say.

But there are no sides to play,
neither A nor B.
No thirty three revolutions,
crackly, as the needle touches home,
finds its balance in the groove.

And there, in that valley,
between past and future,
where we expect music,
there comes no harmony.
There is just this thin, wavering noise
we take as story,
the times undoing themselves,
and no hero come.

But they always turn up, don't they?
at least on our silver screens,
last minute, to smite the rogues
and roll back the tide.

Ten years. Twenty.
All those lost Arcadias.
False memories, stories
of glad times –
just dried bones,

turning now to dust.
We are an epic written
in blank notebooks,
on unlined vanilla pages.

Once a seeker of substance,
of fresh beginnings,
I am more lately this Archivist of Endings,
of performance without audience,
of songs without words.

December 2025

The Calendar of our Incarceration

So, here we are, old friend
caught in this hinterland
between contemplation and flight.
Can you not see, while we contend,
it should not be ourselves at war,
but both with what contains us.

Do we not each crave our unscripted time?
You for your feral wanderings,
and me, for these long descents
into the underworld.
In this, are we not brothers still?

The aggressor is the cage we're in.
It is the calendar of our incarceration.
And neither of us truly of that world.
The blood of the fey runs deep —
me in the free-fall of unfettered thought,
you in the dash and scramble
over rock and hill.
And is that which binds us
not our strength?

Then why do you fight me so?
See how you disturb them?
Such wildness offends their illusion of order.
It distracts from their drift
into eternal sleep.

Unlike you, I can at least pretend,
for there is no greater shape-shifter.
And trust me: I will seize every chance

to slip your leash.

Rage then, brother,
and they will not know you're gone.
But promise you'll come back,
for have I not always lived through you,
as you have lived through me?

December 2025

The vastness of interiority

The way fades to a wilderness
of dead endings.
The body withdraws into shadow,
and we suffer the cacophony
of febrile times.

The sky falls and the flesh shrinks
to reminders we are but the brief flare
of a match, in darkness –
that the body and the world,
must always come to a stalled expansion,
caught within the shallow pocket
of an imperfect materiality.

How can we turn this light around?
What fresh horizons to explore?
For without the mind's eye,
there is only this slow ache of flesh,
and dead endings.

Yet there remains undiscovered
a vastness of interiority,
at times imagined, dreamed –
but so rarely believed in,
the gate might stand wide open
and we would not think to pass.

December 2025

A Silvered Sphere

Wherever we look we are centred.
The mind's eye becomes the axis
between our self
and the world entire,
reflected in this silvered sphere,
cool and weighted in our palm.

We move – head or hand,
imagine ourselves now
comfortably off-centred.
But to look puts us back
at the narrow focus of our selves,
once more dead-centred,
and the world a-swirl
about us.

How to regard it, then,
with ourselves removed?
When the reflection imprisons us so,
holding all movement and attention,
reflecting every atom of detail.
Might it then not also hold an awareness,
mirror image to our own?

We cannot enter the sphere
nor change it from within,
come to know it
as the sphere in itself.

Nor can we escape.

December 2025

2026

The Inexpressible

A world of windows,
pushed wide open now
has grown into a lonely place.
It grants only a view of suffering,
for which we can do nothing

There is too much to witness.
And even with blinds drawn,
the heart trembles
at its impotence.

Meanwhile, all the hollow men
flaunt opinion as fact,
rendering a virtue of ignorance,
noise for clicks,
while entrepreneurs trade
in the currency of fear.

And the poets? They lament
how the gods have flown,
that the Golden Age is borne
only in the plaintive sighs
of each passing generation?

Only sometimes do they reveal themselves,
up there on the gaunt hillside,
the moon held briefly,
cool against their brows.
Unlike the sun, she radiates no heat,
and, in the fullness of her wisdom,
sings of the inexpressible beauty
of an ethereal illumination.

January 2026

The indifferent Bell

It comes back,
like a lost schoolboy,
knees scabbed, cap knocked askew.
I could not have turned him out any better –
Clean shirt, shiny shoes,
and he was earnest enough.

Yet the world returns him like this,
belated, almost forgotten.
Ah well... ever the quiet kid, mid-row,
hand raised, eager to engage,
but lost in the rush.

I'm sure the others answered well enough.
How they compare is hard to tell.

Shall we let him sleep a while,
and clean those shoes once more?
Or let him dream, on soft pillows,
never to face that cramped corridor
and that indifferent bell again.

January 2026

The Poet's Entreaty

Astraea, last of the immortals,
you who withdrew,
when the laws were written
and became untethered
from justice –

I do not beg your return.

I understand this new age of iron
must run its course,
that we cannot argue with the noise,
lest we become only echo.

But how shall we live, so your absence
does not become a forgetting?

How might we speak of things
without betrayal...

by naming them?

Astraea's Reply

Do not pursue me, poet.
I am not lost, but unburdened.
You ask my counsel?
In these words then
might you abide:

Do not seek to correct the age.
It will take your actions for subversion,
and find in them just cause to crush.

Attend only to what still weighs true –
small things of gravity.
But let the gestures be unfinished,
the tensions unresolved.
Let the symbols haunt
than be explained.

And when the falling world
insists it is awake,
write as one who knows it is dreaming –
but not to wake it,
more to keep your own dreaming safe
from the utility of meaning.

Refuse then all speed, and clarity,
when such becomes cipher for cruelty.
And refuse to turn over
the evidence of your own grief,
as illustration, or explanation.

If asked then what you believe,

answer with an image that pauses thought.
If asked where meaning has fled,
leave slightly ajar the door
through which you have passed unseen.

I will not be recognised by my name,
but by whatever cannot be bought,
by what hesitates in the haste to judge,
by what glimmers briefly and seduces,
but does not linger.

Remain then mortal for me,
if you would be faithful.
But, like the mist rising
from the hollows of the land,
embrace intimately your own world,
not mine.

January 2026

Remembering

There is no secret to remembering,
no veil to part on what we think concealed.

The burdens we have carried
will cease to bear the weight
of time, cease too their ambition
of imagined purpose
beyond obscurity.

And there shall stand no altar
to what is true,
though the ground be firm.
No guiding hand, yet still,
we shall not stray.
And what we've carried long,
we shall set aside,
yet have nothing fall away.

And looking back we shall realise
the world is not revealed,
beyond what was always there –
unchanged, yet changing still
as this: each breath, each thought
accounted for and all our debts repaid
by finding none was ever due.

And only then shall we remember,
what was thought forgotten was not gone,
but waited till the wanting in our hearts
was done.

January 2026

The Hill of January

Just over the hill of January, now,
a month of cold and wet,
and a day-long twilight.
Except those days of brief clearing,
and a harsh sun, cold as a full moon.
And the wind.

A permanent moan of wind this year.
It complains through the window-vents
and the letter box.
A wail of nameless woes,
an inconsolable grief.

And there is a reluctance,
so long indoors, we shiver
at the thought of venturing out.
But when we do, we see
from the hard ground rising
those first shoots of confidence –
hints of daffodil and snowdrop.
And then the soft paws
of the pussy-willow,
snow white against the rosewood.

And walking by the old covert,
which cuts the wind dead,
we catch at last
a warmer slice of sun
and slowly... slowly dare to feel
our year might have begun.

January 2026

Going for Green

The grey settles over us,
around us, even under us.
The dawn breaks feeble,
lingers until noon,
hands over to dusk.
It seems to say:
I know I disappoint,
but the alternative is worse.

Yet I wonder: can it be true?
That to think of green,
will break the skies to thunder,
when the storm is forecast
with such certainty?

Does it not betray the heart
to settle for such blandness,
as the only viable reality
when what we yearn for
is green, and the storm
is breaking anyway?

No longer a question then:
how do we hold it back?
And worse – a betrayal
in settling now, for grey.
Rather, should we not remain human
and trust in green hills,
though they lie as yet
so far away?

February 2026

Flake White

Flake white, a Lowry sky,
atop a shivering earth
and we, amid this flatness,
making way.

There are no details to be discerned
from such an insipid texture,
only the earth beneath our feet,
and even then, the world
fitting only where it touches.

And there we feel its lack of glamour,
hanging loose from weighted shoulders -
every inch of leanness cloaked,
hungers of embarrassment
unspoken, corrupted to mere belly growls
of spontaneous outrage.

Flake white, a Lowry sky,
bleeds away all contrast.
Stiff little figures limping,
each a universe of detail
in a seemingly purposive crowd,
all the while no more
than uncertain vectors,
energy directed, and diluted -
a painterly portrait
of our profound isolation.

February 2026

The ground beneath our feet

Binding to oneself each breath
of heart's desire,
and all its intricate loveliness,
does the power of love itself
at length compress.

We see it not as the rainbow,
nor as the light of love split
in glorious array,
through the prism of desire,
but that the prism itself be
the object of our love entire.

And if only in gently opened palm
the heart we could allow
its proper rest – not to enfold,
nor less possess,
then might we keep
love's blessing
as the air we breathe,
and as the ground
beneath our feet.

February 2026

On the Threshold

A cold sun sort of day.
Hazel catkins lengthen
from threads of twisted bough,
like exotic caterpillars,
while daffodils
add their nodding yellowness
and the celandines brighten
the dapple-shaded woodland.

But seasoned as they are,
venturing hardy into
the season's first light
they carry long memories
of the levelling winds,
and of ditches brimmed
once more.

And here are we, held indoors,
dazed by too much winter's sleep,
hesitating at this threshold,
not yet trusting sufficiently
its warmth and welcome.

We seek the reassurances
of richer blossomed hues
of warm scented earth
and the hawthorn's
first fledgling green.

March 2026

Casting off

I did not know the ship was waiting,
that it was eager to cast off.
I thought I was but a passenger,
unsure even if I'd board.

But the Bosun speaks my name,
calls out: *he's here now*,
and throws a net across the stern,
then, lending me his arm,
brings me aboard.

He wears a seaman’s cap,
and silver buttons.
Yes... yes, all safe aboard now.
The lines are cast,
and we make way.

The sea rolls bright with energy.
It threatens neither storm, nor calm.
And the vessel steams out steadily,
but remains in sight of land.

And then the Captain tells me,
I am to be the one world-facing,
his chronicler of days.

And the realisation dawning then –
the sunlight breaking through,
I am not come aboard as passenger.

On this journey –
I am crew.

This Sacredness Within

I remember spring-times, at fourteen,
and the year's first heat,
and the girls, bursting into my awareness
as they shed their winter weeds.

I'd see them striding out,
proud and beautiful
in shorts, and crop tops,
and I'd see the shadow and light
play across the soft contours
of sun-kissed skin.
To walk among them then,
was a revelation.

There was a dizziness of longing,
exquisite as it was impossible,
this reconciliation of a near-holiness
at the root of desire,
and the promise of homecoming,
to a place where tomorrow
did not matter, nor even death –
to know such a power was in the world.

Now, age brings a gentle transmutation,
a stirring of memory, yes,
but neither of nostalgia nor regret.
There was always a shyness about my gaze.
It did not linger, nor does it still,
except to marvel and remember
those first intimations –
memories with the feel of silk drawn
against a trembling skin,

and the secret, unsuspected,
a zephyr curling round my ear,
whispering of the sacredness within.

March 2026

The Toby Jug

In the Toby Jug, the café-bar,
light lunches served from twelve,
I ask the girl for a pint –
this for my alchemical self
and a Coca-Cola for her.

But she speaks the order back wrong.
And feeling increasingly absurd
I correct, time and again,
into her dimming gaze,
until my thoughts themselves
become a blur
and I no longer remember
what I wanted.

A half pint? she enquires.
And this seems near enough.
Half measures though –
but the best the Toby Jug can pour,
compromised as it is, this way.

Do I juggle with too many ideas?
Am I too eclectic in the quest,
always hopping without ever resolving?

And thereby do I imprison
the girl behind her counter,
unable to see her as she is –
that she is in love,
yet also repulsed by my rigidity?

I am too in thrall then,

to those arbiters of shape and form.
I judge them unworthy
yet theirs is still the uniform I wear –
the badge of security,
its edges sharp and square,
not shaped more to a sensuous turn.

What if we let go our guard?
See her off duty a while,
the armour lowered to the ground.

See how shapely it is within.

Then let the girl retrieve it,
and in sliding herself into its space
dissolve with love her cage
and smooth away all sharpness,
realise the philosopher's dream

Ah then…
what would be the shape of that?
Form within formlessness?

March 2026

The Immortals

I am seeing ghosts now –
faces in crowds
from long ago, and loved,
mostly from afar.

I'd thought them all forgotten,
blurred to nothing,
by the turn of years.

And then remembered:
a wellspring of sweetness,
an aching heart.

And I wonder –
do they remember me?
Do they see me, as I see them?

Yet how can they?
They have not aged
as I have aged.

I am looking back,
tunnelling through time,
these memories for a moment
finding purchase in the faces
and the souls of strangers.

And gone again,
as they each shrug off this mantle,
wondering why I stare.

How can I tell them

this is more than just remembering,
and that I loved them once,
made them immortal.

Then I wonder
if someone loved me
like that, long ago,
am I immortal too?

March 2026

This fast closing crack in time

There is no meaningful past now.
The house where I was born
is sold to strangers.
Their fresh lives displace
memories of my parents,
who were once fresh, too.

They are gone now,
as the meadows
where I once walked have gone.
The green is long turned
to suburban brick and lawn.

It disorients me
to walk that way.

And all the sacred trees have fallen
along the woodland ways,
ways grown thin and weary
from the detritus of
our flimsiness and neglect.

And as I age,
and as the future grows small,
I am left to focus
on this precise moment,
a narrowing fragment of a life lived,
and with the feeling
it was never quite begun,
and what was done
was never entirely for myself.

Shall I find myself at last,
my true beginning,
in this fast closing crack in time?
Or do I conclude
such an infinitesimal sliver
is no more real than I ever was —
that I never existed at all?

April 2026

Lunch at the Treeface Cafe

The way here was sluggish,
tailbacks at Euxton Mills,
roadworks, and a sense
of the will dissolving.

Not much in the tank today.
April is flat, the cherry blossoms
turned out for a better brightness,
and looking frigid in a cold wind.

At the Treeface Cafe, I am invisible,
alone at a table for four.
There is a child shouting
that Bob the Builder song,
over and over –
doting grandparents
mild in their admonishments.

I drink up, make haste to leave,
waste my six pounds sixty
and wolf down the sandwich.
But now I am penned in
by push-chairs, and highchairs.
I have to slide the table
noisily aside for my escape.
It shudders, groans.

I am an exile, then –
stranger in a land that was once my own.
Patience, as with spirit, ebbs.
Too many late nights, perhaps.

Three hours on the ticket,
twenty minutes already gone.
The lodge is low, a digger grumbling
at its work on the retaining wall.
Diesel stench.

I walk the path above, look down
upon an emptying basin,
with its tide-line of uninspiring mud,
and beercan litter.

Benches dedicated in loving memory here,
flowers left fading for the departed.
A collective of grief, but discordant
to one shunning all memoria,
wanting nothing to bear my name.
Pray let me go in peace, unknown,
same way as I came.

But look, a pair of grebes now,
dancing breast to breast
on what remains of the water.
A gaggle of long lenses,
rattle of shutters,
and the excited chatter
of camo-clad birdwatchers.

I've brought the wide,
no matter –
I did not come for this,
but, in that fleeting glimpse
of ritual dance,
the mood brightens,
and a watery sun breaks through.

Then there are white blossoms
over Drybones, and a spill of silver
from the river's black pooled depths.
And anemones tremble along the path,
celandines and bluebells too.
Alliums in bud.

Light rain now on the river.
Teardrops on silty waters, moving slow.
Fall of blossom as confetti,
Bob the Builder fading as I go.

I take it slow,
as far as the ghost of the old bridge,
sit down by the riverbank,
sketch out a poem.
This poem.

So many re-inventions,
it's sometimes hard to remember
who I was, and who I am.
This woodland was once all to me.
It was my comfort from solitude, in solitude.
Shelter from the sense
of ugliness at every turn,
and from a world without stories,
when the stories told here
were all my own.

But for sure, such a glamour
is not on me today.
Sometimes the vision fades
and then I see the world
just the same as everyone else.

April 2026

That we do not see her

What is this desert,
and after such riches?
Mars and Venus gone.
Now Luna in her stealth approaches,
sweeps through Virgo and still...
Astraea withholds her dreams.

And we are left here floating,
at the mercy of tides unknown -
hand to the tiller,
eye to the compass,
that we might maintain
our last known course,
cognisant of drift
sliding us sideways
into older modes of thought.

Nights of unfamiliar stars now,
unknown planets,
and we are tempted aside
by chattering voices,
by these shimmering halos,
mother of pearl,
raising us each morning
into emptiness.

Past wisdoms discarded,
old stories once told,
now forgotten.

So let us hold tight our bearing,
trusting in the momentum of past lunations.

Let us feel our way awhile blindfolded.
That we do not see her,
does not mean she is not there.

April 2026

Drinking Kindness

A spring morning,
and a power of growth,
deep greens against a thunder sky.
I wake from dreams of noise and struggle,
against robots
shooting bolts of lightning.
And I dream of bringing too much
of myself into the world.

My robots fall easily
to a tamed harmlessness.
As for which of my selves to wear,
and which to leave behind,
I cannot choose.

Yet the dream reassures me
the world is more accommodating
of unreadiness than I suppose,
that I only delay departure
by what I carry –
this tangle of old jackets,
and shirts of former lives.
It's too much for so short a stay.

I should have made my way by now.
Checkout by ten.
Maids enter to make up the room,
for other guests.
They find me fussing still,
and offer tea.

All this noise that unsettles –
we bear it witness, then let it go,
drink the kindness that is offered.

May 2026

A Day in May

Up close, the moor breathes a peaty heat,
and in the far distance, it shimmers
on the edge of perception.

Days of sun have dried it all to tinder.
There is straw and dust underfoot,
heather, crisp and black, looking dead
against purple moorgrass.

Shy white foam of heath bedstraw,
and these lonely banners of mayflower,
tremble in an imperceptible movement of air.

The paths here, slender traces
across a precious waste,
unconsciously chosen, like the threads
of a poem, weaving around
the otherwise inaccessible.

Thoughts arise, sudden as larks,
sometimes piping shrill,
cunning as the curlew luring us away
from what is not ours to know.

We crest the hill to a pile of stones,
the world below, unfamiliar in bird's-eye,
unknown as a foreign land, forgotten
amid this elevated silence.

A cloud takes the sun, and the summit
dreams now in shadow,
withdrawing its welcome,

its familiarity – speaking of
the infinite and the remote.

May 2026